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# ORTHODOX EVANGELIST



“Do the work of an evangelist” - 2 Tim 4:5

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## What we can learn from the Holy Spirit

by the Rev. Archimandrite Fr. Eusebius Stephanou, Th.D.

**Though the Orthodox Church has a very detailed and authoritative tradition regarding the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, the third Person of the Trinity tends to remain as the most mysterious and unknown. Of course we retain**

tremendous writings of the Church Fathers on the Holy Spirit, such as St. Basil the great, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. Symeon the New Theologian, just to name a few. Yet, this article is geared more toward our reliance upon the Holy Spirit rather than the theological operations and role of the Holy Spirit in creation. I think you will find this past article of Father Stephanou to be both informative and a blessing. *Sincerely, Joseph Abbate.*

Every individual is called by God to become His living Temple. But we must first meet His conditions: to receive Jesus Christ as Savior in faith and Baptism and to live for Him in obedience, becoming like Him, a living Temple of the Holy Spirit. It is only through Jesus that we have access to the Holy Spirit. Our union with Jesus makes it possible for Him to infuse the Spirit into us.

God's word tells us: *“He who cleaves unto the Lord is one Spirit”* (1 Cor. 6:17). When we become one with Jesus in our love for Him and in our submission to His will, we become not only *“flesh of His flesh, bone of His bones,”* but we also become spirit of His Spirit. Firstly, the Holy Spirit baptizes the believer into Christ in water. Then Jesus

baptizes him into the Holy Spirit according to the teaching of Paul: *“For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit”* (1 Cor. 12:13).

Jesus is the baptizer into the Holy Spirit according to the scripture. John the Baptist said: *“I indeed have baptized you with water; but He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit”* (Mark 1:8). It is significant that all four gospels declare this truth, indeed almost in exactly the same language.

It is the function of the second person of the Trinity to breathe the Holy Spirit into the believer. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. Where Christ is, there too, is the Spirit, because He is full of the Holy Spirit. For this reason the Holy Communion does not only renew our physical oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ, but also our spiritual union with Him. His Body and Blood on the Altar of the Eucharist are bearers of the Divine Spirit. Each time the believer receives in repentance and contrition his water Baptism and Holy Spirit Baptism are renewed. The Bread and the Wine of the Holy Table are not changed into Christ's dead Body and Blood, but rather into His resurrected, living and glorified Body and Blood.

## The Holy Spirit Leads

Once the believer is baptized in the Holy Spirit and becomes filled with the Holy Spirit, God expects him to walk in the Holy Spirit. His new life in Christ is essentially a walk in the Spirit in contrast to a walk in the flesh. He becomes cautious against any encroachments of the flesh and its temptations. Scriptures says that the believer *“walks not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”* (Rom. 8:1). Paul exhorts the Galatians: *“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh”* (5:16). *“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit”* (5:25).

The soul lies between two poles: the body and the spirit of man. It decides freely whether to be led by the flesh or by the spirit. If it submits to the dictates of the body it becomes lustful and fleshly. If, however, it yields to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, the soul becomes spiritual and God-like.

The Holy Spirit is the LEADER, because He leads. In order for the believer to walk in the Holy Spirit he must be led of the Spirit. It is a dangerous tendency among Orthodox Christians to rely totally on their Baptism for the Spirit of adoption. You are a child of God, dear reader, not only because of your Baptism, but also because of your obedience to the leading of the Spirit. Did you hear what God's word tells us? *“For as many are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”* (Rom. 8:14).

The sin of disobedience grieves the Spirit of the Lord. What did you say Paul? *“Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God”* (Eph. 4:30). Don't displease God with your sinning after what God has done for you and to what lengths He has gone to deliver you from the pit of Hell, to cleanse you and to make you His adopted child for time and eternity!

The Holy Spirit is also the TEACHER, because He teaches the man and woman in whom He indwells. When we live under the lordship of the Spirit and remain free from the bondage of the flesh, the Holy Spirit becomes God's witness in our heart for distinguishing the truth from error, right from wrong, good from evil, Jesus from Satan.

That inner witness in the illumination of the Holy Spirit. It is the metaphysical light that attests to Christ Who is the Truth and gives us the capacity to glorify and lift Him up.

The criterion, therefore, of truth is ultimately the Holy Spirit on the inside of us. It is the inner standard which we recognize the veracity of doctrine and which enables us to assent to the truth which we hear or read. It is the light of conscience. Analyzing the word "conscience" will bear out this meaning. "Con" in Latin means "together with," while "science" signifies "knowledge."

"Conscience" in effect denotes "to know together with" somebody else. The ego or self in man acquires the knowledge of reality in its union with the Spirit. This occurs in man's awareness of self, the world about him, and of God. It is the primary principle operative in perception and especially in the act and process of cognition "knowledge."

Without the assistance of the Spirit in man the ego is devoid of the capacity of gaining awareness of either self or the physical world around him or finally of God. It is the Spirit that brings the ego into actual contact with reality in all three of its aspects. Christ is the truth and it is the Spirit's function to lead man into the Truth and into all dimensions of Truth. Jesus said: "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

## The Holy Spirit Teaches

Consequently, the Spirit is both the Leader and the Teacher of man, because He teaches him the Truth by bringing him into touch with the Truth in all its facets, whether it be truth in the metaphysical world or in the physical world. But the believer must be cautious against mistaking human wisdom for the teaching of the Holy Spirit. He needs to distinguish between man's wisdom and the Spirit's charisma of knowledge and revelation. "Which things also we speak," says Paul, "not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches" (1 Cor. 2:13).



The Spirit's illumination is the same metaphysical and spiritual light which enables the ego to contact that which is, whether visible or invisible, and to lead him from the relative beings to the Absolute Being, God. The Spirit abides even in the unbeliever, but only for basic intelligence and understanding. It is a fact whether he acknowledges it or not. To attribute, however, his knowledge to a source and power other than the Holy Spirit is the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This is borne out in the first epistle of John (2:27):

*"But the anointing which you have received of him abides in you, and you need not that any man teach you; but*

*the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, you shall abide in him."*

*"But God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God" 1 Cor. 2:10).*

The Holy Spirit leads the believer into a perfect conformity with the Image of God which is the Divine Logos, Jesus Christ, and to His will. That Image is reproduced in the believer by reason of the power of the Holy Spirit. His thoughts and desires spring from the Spirit Who is the Mind of God. His every decision is determined by the Spirit.

We find, for example, in the book of Acts how the Apostles at the first Apostolic Synod in Jerusalem decided according to the mind of the Holy Spirit, as if the Spirit thought and decided for them and together with them. The Greek text *edoxen to Pneumati* means literally that it was the opinion and judgement of the Spirit – an expression they used in order to indicate the source of the pronouncement they made on whether or not Gentile believers were to be required to observe the Mosaic Law, especially on circumcision.

It is also instructive to see how Paul indicates that the Holy Spirit would guide him in his journeys either to decide on a certain destination or deter him from it. The mature Christian knows how to distinguish between the obstacle of Satan and that of the Holy Spirit in a matter of deciding a certain course of action. We read in the book of Acts (16:6f) as follows:

*"Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia and were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia." After*

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they were come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia but the Spirit suffered them not.”

Whose guarantee does the Christian have that the decision he makes is truly the decision of the Holy Spirit? There is no absolute external criterion. A day-by-day obedience is a constantly close walk with Christ is our assurance. It is cleaving to Christ in love and obedience that assures that our thoughts and decisions are those of the Holy Spirit. Let me quote God's promise again to this regard: “He who cleaves unto the Lord is one Spirit.” It is the experience of faith in God's word. Whatever is done without faith is sin, but whatever we do with faith is honored by the Lord.

Only self-will and a rebellious spirit could keep us from identifying with the mind of Christ in a moment of decision making. But when our life is one of total submission to God's will in the Holy Spirit, we can be reasonably safe in believing that our decision is that of the Holy Spirit. It is our trust in God's response to our faith that lends such reassurance. As we cleave unto Christ, we put on His mind and our spirit proves to be His Spirit.

### The Carnal Christian

The unregenerate man who lives in the natural is incapable of responding to truths pertaining to the spiritual world. He lacks the spiritual faculty of knowing and discerning spiritual things. Paul calls such a person who is devoid of the Holy Spirit *psychosis*, which can be translated as “natural” or “soulish.” The term “natural man” lacks the illumination of the Holy Spirit: “*The natural (soulish) man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*” (1 Cor. 2:14).

The “natural man” is in no position to teach the regenerated, spiritual man concerning the truth, because he lacks the mind of Christ with which to instruct. The believer who is “born of

God” can teach and instruct, because the Holy Spirit has given him the mind of Christ. “*For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ*” (1 Cor. 2:16).

The soul stands between the body and the spirit, two opposite poles. While the body is physical and creaturely, the spirit is spiritual and uncreated, being of the nature of God. The soul becomes spiritual and imperishable to the extent it is led of the Spirit. It becomes physical and perishable to the extent it is controlled by the body.

Body and spirit are polarized and rival one another as to which will govern the soul. “*For the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other*” (Gal. 5:17).



It is a daily challenge that confronts the Christian believers: to choose between the lust of the flesh and the leading of the Spirit. Either choice will become evident in the consequences that naturally follow: the works of the flesh or the fruits of the Spirit, for “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (6:7).

The works of the flesh are listed in Galatians (5:19-21): “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying, murders, drunkenness, reveling and such like.” Paul warns the new Galatian believers “that they which do such

things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

A carnal Christian is the person who though baptized in water and the Spirit in faith, manifests in his life the works of the flesh. Your Baptism, Chrismation and Communion will not keep you out of Hell, if you are a carnal Orthodox. You must truly be “born of God,” if you are to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. Your Baptism, dear friend, must become experiential if you are to claim that you have received the gift of rebirth.

If you are only “born of the flesh,” your works will be “flesh,” but if you are “born of the Spirit,” your works will be “spirit,” as Jesus clearly teaches us in John 3:6: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Paul enumerates for us the fruits of the Spirit in the same epistle to the Galatians: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith meekness, temperance” (22:23).

The fruits of the Spirit come with inner spiritual cultivation, while the gifts of the Spirit are divinely endowed upon the believer irrespective of whether he merits them by his maturity or not. It must be stressed that both “fruits” and “gifts” originate supernaturally in the Holy Spirit. They are not the result of mere human effort. The spiritual fruits relate to the believer's character, while the spiritual gifts are tools given to him for service in the Body of Christ. Fruits cannot be a substitute for gifts, neither can gifts be a substitute for fruits. Both are equally important as signs of spiritual maturity and for effective ministry in the Body.

The signs of carnality in the Corinthian Church was factionalism. The Corinthians were reprimanded by Paul for engaging in divisive behavior. Some of them were claiming to be followers of Paul; others were claiming to be disciples of Apollos, while others looked to Peter as their leader. Such divisiveness was manifestly the work of the flesh. Paul called the Corinthian

converts carnal: “Are you not carnal and walk as men?”

It is so easy for Christians to take their eyes off of Jesus and to become followers of men. Satan always tempts believers to give their loyalty to human leaders, thus giving less preeminence to Christ. It is in reality indulging the weakness of our humanity, namely the flesh. Yielding to such a temptation causes us to fall from the level of the supernatural down to the level of the natural and human. We end up “walking as men,” rather than walking in the Spirit of the Lord.

### The Carnal Orthodox

Most Orthodox are quite decent and religious people. But by the standards of God's word they are carnal Orthodox. That does not mean that they are guilty of sexual violations. No, not at all. It means simply that they live and function on the level of the natural. Most of our Churches operate too much in the natural. There are few, if any, signs of the supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the individual lives of our people, as well as in the collective life of our local Churches.

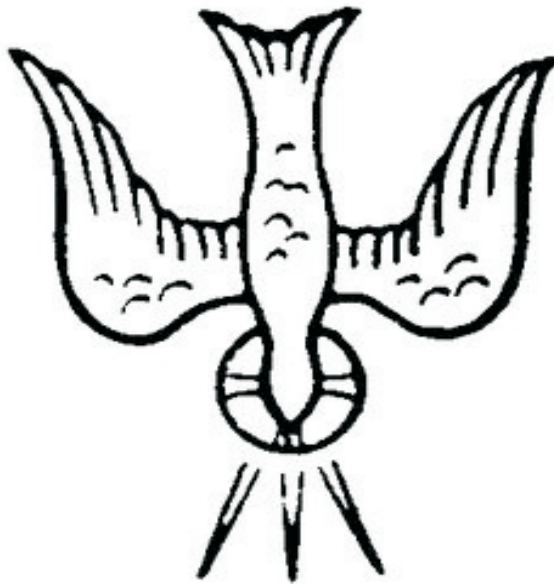
It's no secret. The reason why evangelism and reconversion are desperately needed in Orthodoxy is the fact that *carnal Orthodox* fill our Churches and some of them even exercise decision-making authority. They “*walk as men*,” to use the Pauline expression directed to the Corinthians.

Too many Orthodox walk in the natural “as men,” leaning on the arm of flesh. The spiritual superficiality and shallowness that prevail in the Church bear this fact out. Indeed very often they are intimidated by the witness of those Orthodox who try to “walk in the Spirit.” They come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and react sometimes irrationally.

Those who live in the natural and remain contented with the minimum from God are those who attend the

Divine Liturgy “for the worse.” Remember the admonition of Paul? “I praise you not, that you come together not for the better, but for the worse.” They are the ones that receive of the Holy Communion unto their judgement and their condemnation. Some of us think that they can hide their failures and spiritual complacency behind the Liturgy, but in reality we come under more severe judgement. They “eat and drink damnation to themselves, not discerning the Lord's body.”

It is not simply a matter of being spiritually imperfect. No. Communion is for the imperfect believer who strives for perfection in constant growth. However, it is the attitude of indifference and laziness



toward spiritual things that marks the carnal Christian. The Lord has been showing me in the last few years that I must declare this truth to His Orthodox people many of whom perish because they take the Sacraments of the Church in a mechanical manner, as if they worked some kind of religious magic on them apart from their own inner state. Is it any wonder that many of our people remain at a spiritual standstill despite all the Sacraments they have received.

Not only the laity, but even some of us in the clergy do not discern

spiritual things, because too many of us live in the natural and minister in the natural. In other words, we lean on our own human wisdom and ingenuity to get things done in the Church. St. Symeon states: “How can such people have an understanding of the mysteries of God without having experienced in themselves the remolding, the renewal, the transformation, the refashioning, the rebirth that is produced by the Holy Spirit?” (Catechesis 24).

In case you don't know, this kind of talk got this man of God in real trouble. He was removed from his position as Abbot of St. Mammias Monastery in Constantinople and banished by the Ecumenical Patriarch to a deserted island where he lived out the rest of his life in peace and prayer.

The moment you get baptized in the Spirit and experience the reality that you are “born of God,” you are in for trouble. You might as well expect it. Satan will be after you as never before. To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to begin your new stage of life – the stage of confrontation, rejection, persecution. Be ready to pay the price for going all the way with Christ.

While we might have to battle Satan, however, more severely, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to repel his attacks and to hold on to our victory. We are assured of victory in every skirmish we have with our enemy. We need not fear defeat, “because the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.”

As believers, we are given the endowment of power from on high. Walking in the Spirit does not mean that our life will be all peaches and cream. It means constant warfare. But the marvelous thing is that it is a walk in the strength of the Lord. It is a walk in constant victory!